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The HISTORY of MAY DAY

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The Fight for the Shorter Workday

The origin of May Day is indissolubly bound up with the struggle for the shorter workday—a demand of major political significance for the working class. This struggle is manifest almost from the beginning of the factory system in the United States.

Although the demand for higher wages appears to be the most prevalent cause for the early strikes in this country, the question of shorter hours and the right to organize were always kept in the foreground when workers formulated their demands against the bosses and the government. As exploitation was becoming intensified and workers were feeling more and more the strain of inhumanly long working hours, the demand for an appreciable reduction of hours became more pronounced.

Already at the opening of the 19th century workers in the United States made known their grievances against working from "sunrise to sunset," the then prevailing workday. Fourteen, sixteen and even eighteen hours a day were not uncommon. During the conspiracy trial against the leaders of striking cordwainers in 1806, it was brought out that workers were employed as long as nineteen and twenty hours a day.

The twenties and thirties are replete with strikes for reduction of hours of work and definite demands for a 10-hour day were put forward in many industrial centers. The organization of what is considered as the first trade union in the world, the Mechanics' Union of Philadelphia, preceding by two years the one formed by workers in England, can be definitely ascribed to a strike of building trade workers in Philadelphia in 1827 for the 10-hour day. During the bakers' strike in New York in 1834 the *Workingmen's Advocate* reported that "journeymen employed in the

loaf bread business have for years been suffering worse than Egyptian bondage. They have had to labor on an average of eighteen to twenty hours out of the twenty-four."

The demand in those localities for a 10-hour day soon grew into a movement, which, although impeded by the crisis of 1837, led the federal government under President Van Buren to decree the 10-hour day for all those employed on government work. The struggle for the universality of the 10-hour day, however, continued during the next decades. No sooner had this demand been secured in a number of industries than the workers began to raise the slogan for an 8-hour day. The feverish activity in organizing labor unions during the fifties gave this new demand an impetus which, however, was checked by the crisis of 1857. The demand was, however, won in a few well-organized trades before the crisis. That the movement for a shorter workday was not only peculiar to the United States, but was prevalent wherever workers were exploited under the rising capitalist system, can be seen from the fact that even in far away Australia the building trade workers raised the slogan "8 hours work, 8 hours recreation and 8 hours rest" and were successful in securing this demand in 1856.

Eight-Hour Movement Started in America

The 8-hour day movement which directly gave birth to May Day, must, however, be traced to the general movement initiated in the United States in 1884. However, a generation before a national labor organization, which at first gave great promise of developing into a militant organizing center of the American working class, took up the question of a shorter workday and proposed to organize a broad movement in its behalf. The first years of the Civil War, 1861-1862, saw the disappearance of the few national trade unions which had been formed just before the war began, especially the Molders' Union and the Machinists' and Blacksmiths' Union. The years immediately following, however, witnessed the unification on a national scale of a number of local labor organizations, and the urge for a national federation

of all these unions became apparent. On August 20, 1866, there gathered in Baltimore delegates from three scores of trade unions who formed the National Labor Union. The movement for the national organization was led by William H. Sylvis, the leader of the reconstructed Molders' Union, who, although a young man, was the outstanding figure in the labor movement of those years. Sylvis was in correspondence with the leaders of the First International in London and helped to influence the National Labor Union to establish relations with the General Council of the International.

It was at the founding convention of the National Labor Union in 1866 that the following resolution was passed dealing with the shorter workday:

> The first and great necessity of the present, to free labor of this country from capitalist slavery, is the passing of a law by which 8 hours shall be the normal working day in all states in the American union. We are resolved to put forth all our strength until this glorious result is attained.

The same convention voted for independent political action in connection with the securing of the legal enactment of the 8-hour day and the "election of men pledged to sustain and represent the interests of the industrial classes."

The program and policies of the early labor movement, although primitive and not always sound, were based, nevertheless, on healthy proletarian instinct and could have served as starting points for the development of a genuine revolutionary labor movement in this country were it not for the reformist misleaders and capitalist politicians who later infested the labor organizations and directed them in wrong channels. Thus 65 years ago, the national organization of American labor, the N. L. U., expressed itself against "capitalist slavery" and for independent political action.

Eight-hour leagues were formed as a result of the agitation of the National Labor Union; and through the political activity which the organization developed, several state governments

adopted the 8-hour day on public work and the U. S. Congress enacted a similar law in 1868.

Sylvis continued to keep in touch with the International in London. Due to his influence as president of the organization, the National Labor Union voted at its convention in 1867 to cooperate with the international working class movement and in 1869 it voted to accept the invitation of the General Council and send a delegate to the Basle Congress of the International. Unfortunately Sylvis died just before the N. L. U. convention, and A. C. Cameron, the editor of the *Workingmen's Advocate,* published in Chicago, was sent as delegate in his stead. In a special resolution the General Council mourned the death of this promising young American labor leader. "The eyes of all were turned upon Sylvis, who, as a general of the proletarian army, had an experience of ten years, outside of his great abilities—and Sylvis is dead." The passing of Sylvis was one of the contributing causes of the decay which soon set in and led to the disappearance of the National Labor Union.

First International Adopts the Eight-Hour Day

The decision for the 8-hour day was made by the National Labor Union in August, 1866. In September of the same year the Geneva Congress of the First International went on record for the same demand in the following words:

> The legal limitation of the working day is a preliminary condition without which all further attempts at improvements and emancipation of the working class must prove abortive. . . . The Congress proposes 8 hours as the legal limit of the working day.

Marx on the Eight-Hour Movement

In the chapter on "The Working Day" in the first volume of *Capital,* published in 1867, Marx calls attention to the inauguration of the 8-hour movement by the National Labor Union. In the passage, famous especially because it contains Marx's telling reference to the solidarity of class interests between the Negro and white workers, he wrote:

In the United States of America, any sort of independent labor movement was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labor with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labor with a black skin is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new vigorous life sprang. The first fruit of the Civil War was an agitation for the 8-hour day—a movement which ran with express speed from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California.

Marx calls attention to how almost simultaneously, in fact within two weeks of each other, a workers' convention meeting in Baltimore voted for the 8-hour day, and an international congress meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, adopted a similar decision. "Thus on both sides of the Atlantic did the working class movement, spontaneous outgrowth of the conditions of production," endorse the same movement of the limitation of hours of labor and concretize it in the demand for the 8-hour day.

That the decision of the Geneva Congress was prompted by the American decision can be seen from the following portion of the resolution: "As this limitation represents the general demand of the workers of the North-American United States, the Congress transforms this demand into the general platform of the workers of the whole world."

A similar influence of the American labor movement upon an international congress and in behalf of the same cause was exerted more profoundly 23 years later.

May Day Born in the United States

The First International ceased to exist as an international organization in 1872, when its headquarters were removed from London to New York, although it was not officially disbanded till 1876. It was at the first congress of the reconstituted International, later known as the Second International, held at Paris in 1889, that May First was set aside as a day upon which the workers of the world, organized in their political parties and trade unions, were to fight for the important political demand: the 8-hour day. The Paris decision was influenced by a decision made at Chicago five years earlier by delegates of a young

American labor organization—the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, later known under the abbreviated name, American Federation of Labor. At the Fourth Convention of this organization, October 7, 1884, the following resolution was passed:

> Resolved by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from May First, 1886, and that we recommend to labor organizations throughout their jurisdiction that they so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution by the time named.

Although nothing was said in the resolution about the methods by which the Federation expected to establish the 8-hour day, it is self-evident that an organization which at that time commanded an adherence of not more than 50,000 members could not declare "that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's work" without putting up a fight for it in the shops, mills, and mines where its members were employed, and without attempting to draw into the struggle for the 8-hour day still larger numbers of workers. The provision in the resolution that the unions affiliated to the Federation "so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution" referred to the matter of paying strike benefits to their members who were expected to strike on May First, 1886, for the 8-hour day, and would probably have to stay out long enough to need assistance from the union. As this strike action was to be national in scope and involve all the affiliated organizations, the unions, according to their by-laws, had to secure the endorsement of the strike by their members, particularly since that would involve the expenditure of funds, etc. It must be remembered that the Federation, just as the A. F. of L. today, was organized on a voluntary, federation basis, and decisions of a national convention could be binding upon affiliated unions only if those unions endorsed these decisions.

Preparations for May Day Strike

Although the decade 1880-1890 was generally one of the most active in the development of American industry and the exten-

sion of the home market, the year 1884-1885 experienced a depression which was a cyclical depression following the crisis of 1873. The movement for a shorter workday received added impetus from the unemployment and the great suffering which prevailed during that period, just as at the present time the demand for a 7-hour day is becoming a popular issue on account of the tremendous unemployment which American workers are experiencing.

The great strike struggles of 1877, in which tens of thousands of railroad and steel workers militantly fought against the corporations and the government which sent troops to suppress the strikes, left an impress on the whole labor movement. It was the first great mass action of the American working class on a national scale and, although they were defeated by the combined forces of the State and capital, the American workers emerged from these struggles with a clearer understanding of their class position in society, a greater militancy and a heightened morale. It was in part an answer to the coal barons of Pennsylvania who, in their attempt to destroy the miners' organization in the anthracite region, railroaded ten militant miners (Molly Maguires) to the gallows in 1875.

The Federation, just organized, saw the possibility of utilizing the slogan of the 8-hour day as a rallying organization slogan among the great masses of workers who were outside of the Federation and the Knights of Labor, an older and then still growing organization. The Federation appealed to the Knights of Labor for support in the movement for the 8-hour day, realizing that only a general action involving all organized labor, could make possible favorable results.

At the convention of the Federation in 1885, the resolution on the walk-out for May First of the following year was reiterated and several national unions took action to prepare for the struggle, among them particularly the Carpenters and Cigar Makers. The agitation for the May First action for the 8-hour day showed immediate results in the growth of membership of the existing unions. The Knights of Labor grew by leaps and bounds, reaching

the apex of its growth in 1886. It is reported that the K. of L., which was better known than the Federation and was considered a fighting organization, increased its membership from 200,000 to nearly 700,000 during that period. The Federation, first to inaugurate the movement and definitely to set a date for the strike for the 8-hour day, also grew in numbers and particularly in prestige among the broad masses of the workers. As the day of the strike was approaching and it was becoming evident that the leadership of the K. of L., especially Terrence Powderly, were sabotaging the movement and even secretly advising its unions not to strike, the popularity of the Federation was still more enhanced. The rank and file of both organizations were enthusiastically preparing for the struggle. Eight-hour day leagues and associations sprang up in various cities and an elevated spirit of militancy was felt throughout the labor movement, which was infecting masses of unorganized workers.

The Strike Movement Spreads

The best way to learn the mood of the workers is to study the extent and seriousness of their struggles. The number of strikes during a given period is a good indicator of the fighting mood of the workers. The number of strikes during 1885 and 1886 as compared with previous years shows what a spirit of militancy was animating the labor movement. Not only were the workers preparing for action on May First, 1886, but in 1885 the number of strikes already showed an appreciable increase. During the years 1881-1884 the number of strikes and lockouts averaged less than 500, and on the average involved only about 150,000 workers a year. The strikes and lockouts in 1885 increased to about 700 and the number of workers involved jumped to 250,000. In 1886 the number of strikes more than doubled over 1885, attaining to as many as 1,572, with a proportional increase in the number of workers affected, now 600,000. How widespread the strike movement became in 1886 can be seen from the fact that while in 1885 there were only 2,467 establishments affected by strikes, the number involved in the following year had increased

to 11,562. In spite of open sabotage by the leadership of the K. of L., it was estimated that over 500,000 workers were directly involved in strikes for the 8-hour day.

The strike center was Chicago, where the strike movement was most widespread, but many other cities were involved in the struggle on May First. New York, Baltimore, Washington, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and many other cities made a good showing in the walkout. The characteristic feature of the strike movement was that the unskilled and unorganized workers were drawn into the struggle, and that sympathetic strikes were quite prevalent during that period. A rebellious spirit was abroad in the land, and bourgeois historians speak of the "social war" and "hatred for capital" which was manifested during these strikes, and of the enthusiasm of the rank and file which pervaded the movement. It is estimated that about half of the number of workers who struck on May First were successful, and where they did not secure the 8-hour day, they succeeded in appreciably reducing the hours of labor.

The Chicago Strike and Haymarket

The May First strike was most aggressive in Chicago, which was at that time the center of a militant Left-wing labor movement. Although insufficiently clear politically on a number of the problems of the labor movement, it was nevertheless a fighting movement, always ready to call the workers to action, develop their fighting spirit and set as their goal not only the immediate improvement of their living and working conditions, but the abolition of the capitalist system as well.

With the aid of the revolutionary labor groups the strike in Chicago assumed the largest proportions. An 8-hour Association was formed long in advance of the strike to prepare for it. The Central Labor Union, composed of the Left-wing labor unions, gave full support to the 8-hour Association, which was a united front organization, including the unions affiliated to the Federation, the K. of L., and the Socialist Labor Party. On the Sunday before May First the Central Labor Union organized a mobiliza-

tion demonstration which was attended by 25,000 workers.

On May First Chicago witnessed a great outpouring of workers, who laid down tools at the call of the organized labor movement of the city. It was the most effective demonstration of class solidarity yet experienced by the labor movement itself. The importance at that time of the demand—the 8-hour day—and the extent and character of the strike gave the movement significant political meaning. This significance was deepened by the developments of the next few days. The 8-hour movement, culminating in the strike on May First, 1886, forms by itself a glorious chapter in the fighting history of the American working class.

But revolutions have their counter-revolutions until the revolutionary class finally establishes its complete control. The victorious march of the Chicago workers was arrested by the then superior combined force of the employers and the capitalist state, determined to destroy the militant leaders, hoping thereby to deal a deadly blow to the entire labor movement of Chicago. The events of May 3 and 4, which led to what is known as the Haymarket Affair, were a direct outgrowth of the May First strike. The demonstration held on May 4th at Haymarket Square was called to protest against the brutal attack of the police upon a meeting of striking workers at the McCormick Reaper Works on May 3, where six workers were killed and many wounded. The meeting was peaceful and about to be adjourned when the police again launched an attack upon the assembled workers. A bomb was thrown into the crowd, killing a sergeant. A battle ensued with the result that seven policemen and four workers were dead. The blood bath at Haymarket Square, the railroading to the gallows of Parsons, Spies, Fischer, and Engel, and the imprisonment of the other militant Chicago leaders, was the counter-revolutionary answer of the Chicago bosses. It was the signal for action to the bosses all over the country. The second half of 1886 was marked by a concentrated offensive of the employers, determined to regain the position lost during the strike movement of 1885-1886.

One year after the hanging of the Chicago labor leaders, the



CHICAGO WORKERS PARADE ON THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL MAY DAY, 1890

Federation, now known as the American Federation of Labor, at its convention in St. Louis in 1888, voted to rejuvenate the movement for the 8-hour day. May First, which was already a tradition, having served two years before as the concentration point of the powerful movement of the workers based upon a political class issue, was again chosen as the day upon which to re-inaugurate the struggle for the 8-hour day. May First, 1890, was to witness a nation-wide strike for the shorter workday. At the convention in 1889, the leaders of the A. F. of L., headed by Samuel Gompers, succeeded in limiting the strike movement. It was decided that the Carpenters' Union, which was considered best prepared for the strike, should lead off with the strike, and if it proved successful, other unions were to fall in line.

In his autobiography Gompers tells how the A. F. of L. contributed to making May Day an international labor holiday: "As plans for the 8-hour movement developed, we were constantly realizing how we could widen our purpose. As the time of the meeting of the International Workingmen's Congress in Paris approached, it occurred to me that we could aid our movement by an expression of world-wide sympathy from that congress." Gompers, who had already exhibited all the attributes of reformism and opportunism which later came to full bloom in his class collaborationist policy, was ready to get the support of a movement among the workers, the influence of which he strongly combated.

May Day Becomes International

On July 14, 1889, the hundredth anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, there assembled in Paris leaders from organized revolutionary proletarian movements of many lands, to form once more an international organization of workers, patterned after the one formed 25 years earlier by their great teacher, Karl Marx. Those assembled at the foundation meeting of what was to become the Second International heard from the American delegates about the struggle in America for the 8-hour day during 1884-1886, and the recent rejuvenation of the movement. Inspired

by the example of the American workers, the Paris Congress adopted the following resolution:

> The Congress decides to organize a great international demonstration, so that in all countries and in all cities on one appointed day the toiling masses shall demand of the state authorities the legal reduction of the working day to eight hours, as well as the carrying out of other decisions of the Paris Congress. Since a similar demonstration has already been decided upon for May 1, 1890, by the American Federation of Labor at its Convention in St. Louis, December, 1888, this day is accepted for the international demonstration. The workers of the various countries must organize this demonstration according to conditions prevailing in each country.

The clause in the resolution which speaks of the organization of the demonstration with regard to the objective conditions prevailing in each country gave some parties, particularly the British movement, an opportunity to interpret the resolution as not mandatory upon all countries. Thus at the very formation of the Second International, there were parties who looked upon it as merely a consultative body, functioning only during Congresses for the exchange of information and opinions, but not as a centralized organization, a revolutionary world proletarian party, such as Marx had tried to make the First International a generation before. When Engels wrote to his friend Sorge in 1874, before the First International was officially disbanded in America, "I think that the next International, formed after the teachings of Marx, will have become widely known during the next years, will be a purely Communist International," he did not foresee that at the very launching of the rejuvenated International there would be present reformist elements who viewed it as a voluntary federation of Socialist parties, independent of each other and each a law unto itself.

But May Day, 1890, was celebrated in many European countries, and in the United States the Carpenters' Union and other building trades entered into a general strike for the 8-hour day. Despite the Exception Laws against the Socialists, workers in the various German industrial cities celebrated May Day, which was marked by fierce struggles with the police. Similarly in other

European capitals demonstrations were held, although the authorities warned against them and the police tried to suppress them. In the United States, the Chicago and New York demonstrations were of particularly great significance. Many thousands paraded the streets in support of the 8-hour day demand; and the demonstrations were closed with great open air mass meetings at central points.

At the next Congress, in Brussels, 1891, the International reiterated the original purpose of May First, to demand the 8-hour day, but added that it must serve also as a demonstration in behalf of the demands to improve working conditions, and to insure peace among the nations. The revised resolution particularly stressed the importance of the "class character of the May First demonstrations" for the 8-hour day and the other demands which would lead to the "deepening of the class struggle." The resolution also demanded that work be stopped "wherever possible." Although the reference to strikes on May First was only conditional, the International began to enlarge upon and concretize the purposes of the demonstrations. The British Laborites again showed their opportunism by refusing to accept even the conditional proposal for a strike on May First, and together with the German Social-Democrats voted to postpone the May Day demonstration to the Sunday following May First.

Engels on International May Day

In his preface to the fourth German edition of the Communist Manifesto, which he wrote on May 1, 1890, Engels, reviewing the history of the international proletarian organizations, calls attention to the significance of the first International May Day:

> As I write these lines, the proletariat of Europe and America is holding a review of its forces; it is mobilized for the first time as One army, under One flag, and fighting One immediate aim: an eight-hour working day, established by legal enactment. . . . The spectacle we are now witnessing will make the capitalists and landowners of all lands realize that today the proletarians of all lands are, in very truth, united. If only Marx were with me to see it with his own eyes!

The significance of simultaneous international proletarian demonstration was appealing more and more to the imagination and revolutionary instincts of the workers throughout the world, and every year witnessed greater masses participating in the demonstrations.

The response of the workers showed itself in the following addition to the May First resolution adopted at the next Congress of the International at Zurich in 1893:

> The demonstration on May First for the 8-hour day must serve at the same time as a demonstration of the determined will of the working class to destroy class distinctions through social change and thus enter on the road, the only road leading to peace for all peoples, to international peace.

Although the original draft of the resolution proposed to abolish class distinctions through "social *revolution*" and not through "social change," yet the resolution definitely elevated May First to a higher political level. It was to become a demonstration of power and the will of the proletariat to challenge the existing order, in addition to the demand for the 8-hour day.

Reformists Attempt to Cripple May Day

The reformist leaders of the various parties tried to devitalize the May First demonstrations by turning them into days of rest and recreation instead of days of struggle. This is why they always insisted on organizing the demonstrations on the Sunday nearest May First. On Sundays workers would not have to strike to stop work; they were not working anyway. To the reformist leaders May Day was only an international labor holiday, a day of pageants and games in the parks or outlying country. That the resolution of the Zurich Congress demanded that May Day should be a "demonstration of the determined will of the working class to destroy class distinctions," *i.e.*, the demonstration of the will to fight for the destruction of the capitalist system of exploitation and wage slavery, did not trouble the reformists, since they did not consider themselves bound by the decisions of international congresses. International Socialist Congresses were to

them but meetings for international friendship and good-will, like many other congresses that used to gather from time to time in various European capitals before the war. They did everything to discourage and thwart joint international action of the proletariat, and decisions of international congresses which did not conform with their ideas remained mere paper resolutions. Twenty years later the "socialism" and "internationalism" of these reformist leaders stood exposed in all their nakedness. In 1914 the International lay shattered because from its very birth it carried within it the seeds of its own destruction—the reformist misleaders of the working class.

At the International Congress at Paris in 1900 the May Day resolution of the previous Congresses was again adopted, and was strengthened by the statement that stoppage of work on May First would make the demonstration more effective. More and more, May Day demonstrations were becoming demonstrations of power; open street fighting with the police and military taking place in all important industrial centers. Numbers of workers participating in the demonstrations and stopping work on that day were growing. May Day was becoming more and more menacing to the ruling class. It became Red Day, which authorities in all lands looked at with foreboding when each May Day came around.

Lenin on May Day

Early in his activity in the Russian revolutionary movement Lenin contributed to making May Day known to the Russian workers as a day of demonstration and struggle. While in prison, in 1896, Lenin wrote a May Day leaflet for the St. Petersburg Union of Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class, one of the first Marxist political groups in Russia. The leaflet was smuggled out of prison and 2,000 mimeographed copies distributed among workers in 40 factories. It was very short and written in Lenin's characteristically simple and direct style, so that the least developed among the workers could understand it. "When a month later the famous textile strikes of 1896 broke out, workers were

telling us that the first impetus was given by the little modest May Day leaflet," wrote a contemporary who helped to issue it.

After telling the workers how they are exploited for the benefit of the owners of the factories in which they work, and how the government persecutes those who demand improvement in their conditions, Lenin proceeds to write about the significance of May Day.

In France, England, Germany and other countries where workers have already been united in powerful unions and have won for themselves many rights, they organized on April 19 (May 1) [the Russian calendar was then 13 days behind the West-European] a general holiday of Labor. Leaving the stifling factories they march with unfurled banners, to the strains of music, along the main streets of the cities, demonstrating to the bosses their continuously growing power. They assemble at great mass demonstrations where speeches are made recounting the victories over the bosses during the preceding year and lay plans for struggle in the future. Under the threat of strike the bosses do not dare to fine the workers for not appearing at the factories on that day. On this day the workers also remind the bosses of their main demand: 8 hours work, 8 hours rest, and 8 hours recreation. This is what the workers of other countries are demanding now.

The Russian revolutionary movement utilized May Day to great advantage. In the preface to a pamphlet, *May Days in Kharkov,* published in November, 1900, Lenin wrote:

In another six months, the Russian workers will celebrate the first of May of the first year of the new century, and it is time we set to work to make the arrangements for organizing the celebrations in as large a number of centers as possible, and on as imposing a scale as possible, not only by the number that will take part in them, but also by their organized character, by the class-consciousness they will reveal, by the determination that will be shown to commence the irrepressible struggle for the political liberation of the Russian people, and, consequently, for a free opportunity for the class development of the proletariat and its open struggle for Socialism.

It can be seen how important Lenin considered the May Day demonstrations, since he called attention to them six months ahead of time. To him May Day was a rallying point for "the irrepressible struggle for the political liberation of the Russian

people," for "the class development of the proletariat and its open struggle for Socialism."

Speaking of how May Day celebrations "can become great political demonstrations," Lenin asked why the Kharkov May Day celebration in 1900 was "an event of outstanding importance," and answered, "the mass participation of the workers in the strike, the huge mass meetings in the streets, the unfurling of red flags, the presentation of demands indicated in leaflets and the revolutionary character of these demands—eight-hour day and political liberty."

Lenin upbraids the Kharkov Party leaders for joining the demands for the 8-hour day with other minor and purely economic demands, for he does not want the political character of May Day in any way beclouded. He writes in this preface:

> The first of these demands [8-hour day] is the general demand put forward by the proletariat in all countries. The fact that this demand was put forward indicates that the advanced workers of Kharkov realize their solidarity with the international Socialist labor movement. But precisely for this reason a demand like this should not have been included among minor demands like better treatment by foremen, or a ten per cent increase in wages. The demand for an eight-hour day, however, is the demand of the whole proletariat, presented, not to individual employers, but to the government as the representative of the whole of the present-day social and political system, to the capitalist class as a whole, the owners of all the means of production.

May Day Political Slogans

May Days became focal points for the international revolutionary proletariat. To the original demand for the 8-hour day were added other significant slogans on which the workers were called upon to concentrate during their May Day strikes and demonstrations. These included: International Working Class Solidarity; Universal Suffrage; War Against War; Against Colonial Oppression; the Right to the Streets; Freeing of Political Prisoners; the Right to Political and Economic Organization of the Working Class.

The last time the old International spoke on the question of

May Day was at the Amsterdam Congress of 1907. After reviewing the various political slogans which were employed in the demonstrations and calling attention to the fact that in some countries these demonstrations were still taking place on Sundays instead of May First, the resolution concludes:

The International Socialist Congress in Amsterdam calls upon all Social-Democratic Party organizations and trade unions of all countries to demonstrate energetically on May First for the legal establishment of the 8-hour day, for the class demands of the proletariat, and for universal peace. The most effective way of demonstrating on May First is by stoppage of work. The Congress therefore makes it mandatory upon the proletarian organizations of all countries to stop work on May First, wherever it is possible without injury to the workers.

When the massacre of the strikers in the Lena goldfields in Siberia in April, 1912, placed again the question of revolutionary mass proletarian action on the order of the day in Russia, it was on May Day of that year that hundreds of thousands of Russian workers stopped work and came out into the streets to challenge black reaction, holding sway since the defeat of the first Russian Revolution in 1905. Lenin wrote about this May Day:

The great May strike of the workers all over Russia, and the street demonstrations connected with it, the revolutionary proclamations, the revolutionary speeches to the working masses, show clearly that Russia has once more entered the period of a rising revolutionary situation.

Rosa Luxemburg on May Day

In an article written for May Day, 1913, Rosa Luxemburg, herself a staunch revolutionist, stressed the revolutionary character of May Day: "The brilliant chief idea of the May Day celebration is the independent action of the proletarian masses, is the political mass action of the millions of workers. . . . The excellent purpose of the Frenchman Lavigne at the international congress in Paris combined with the direct international mass manifestation, the laying down of tools, is a demonstration and fighting tactic for the 8-hour day, world peace and Socialism." Always a close student of imperialist rivalries, Rosa Luxemburg

saw the war coming and she was anxious to make clear that May Day was especially the day for the dissemination of the ideas of international solidarity among workers, a day for international action against imperialist war. Writing a year before the war broke out she called attention to the fact that "the more the May Day idea, the idea of resolute mass action as demonstrations of international solidarity and as a fighting tactic for peace and for Socialism, even in the strongest section of the International, the German working class, strikes root, the greater guarantee we shall have that from the world war, which will inevitably take place sooner or later, there will result an ultimately victorious settlement of the struggle between the world of labor and that of capital."

May Day in War Time

The betrayal by the Social-patriots during the war appeared in bold relief on May Day, 1915. This was a logical outgrowth of the class peace they made with the imperialist governments in August, 1914. The German Social-Democracy called upon the workers to remain at work; the French Socialists in a special manifesto assured the authorities that they need not fear May First, and the workers were importuned to work for the defense of "their" country. The same attitude could be found among the Socialist majorities of the other warring countries. Only the Bolsheviks of Russia and the revolutionary minorities in other countries remained true to Socialism and internationalism. The voices of Lenin, Luxemburg, and Liebknecht were raised against the bacchanale of social-chauvinism. Partial strikes and open skirmishes in the streets on May Day, 1916, showed that the workers in all warring countries were freeing themselves from the poisonous influence of their traitorous leaders. For Lenin, as for all revolutionists, "the collapse of opportunism (the collapse of the Second International.—*A. T.*) is beneficial for the labor movement" and Lenin's call for a new International, free of the betrayers, was the demand of the hour.

The Zimmerwald (1915) and the Kienthal (1916) Conferences

helped to knit together the revolutionary internationalist parties and minorities under Lenin's slogan of turning the imperialist war into civil war. The huge demonstrations in Berlin on May Day, 1916, organized by Karl Liebknecht and his followers in the Socialist movement, bore testimony to the living forces of the working class, which were breaking through in spite of the police prohibitions and the opposition of the official leadership.

In the United States May Day was not abandoned when war was declared in 1917. The revolutionary elements in the Socialist Party took seriously the anti-war resolution of the party adopted at the Emergency St. Louis Convention early in April and utilized May Day to protest against the imperialist war. The demonstration in Cleveland held on Public Square and organized by Charles E. Ruthenberg, then local secretary of the S. P. and later one of the founders and leaders of the Communist Party, was particularly militant. Over 20,000 workers paraded the streets to Public Square and were augmented there by many thousands more. The police brutally attacked the meeting, killing one worker and fatally wounding another.

May Day, 1917, the July Days, and finally the October Days in Russia were but stages in the development of the Russian Revolution to its fulfillment. May Day, together with other days rich in revolutionary traditions—January 22 ("Bloody Sunday," 1905), March 18 (Paris Commune, 1871), November 7 (Seizure of Power, 1917)—are today holidays in the First Workers' Republic, while the 8-hour day, the original demand of May Day, has been superseded in the Soviet Union by the inauguration of the 7-hour day.

The Comintern Inherits May Day Traditions

The Communist International, inheritor of the best traditions of the revolutionary proletarian movement since Marx and Engels published the Communist Manifesto in 1848, carries on the traditions of May Day, and the Communist parties of the various capitalist countries call upon the workers each year to stop work on May Day, to go into the streets, to demonstrate their growing strength and international solidarity, to demand a shorter work-

day—now the 7-hour day—without reduction in pay, to demand social insurance, to fight the war danger and defend the Soviet Union, to fight against imperialism and colonial oppression, to struggle against race discrimination and lynching, to denounce the social-fascists as part of the capitalist machine, to resolve to build their revolutionary unions, to proclaim their determination and iron will to organize for the overthrow of the capitalist system and for the establishment of a universal Soviet Republic.

A Political Mass Strike on May Day

Each year the struggles of May Day are lifted to a higher level. Born in the United States in the throes of a general strike movement and in a fight for a major political demand, each May Day should witness a political strike on behalf of the major class issues of the American workers enumerated above. Old and young workers, men and women, Negro and white, should be drawn into participation in the May Day actions. There should be *strikes* on May Day, for stoppage of work is the very tradition of May First. The strikes should be *mass* strikes involving great numbers of workers leaving their workshops *collectively,* not as individuals. Whole industrial units should be stopped, for only such strikes are effective demonstrations of the determined will of the workers to struggle. These mass strikes should be *political, i. e.,* based on major political issues affecting the whole working class.

Although the Communist Party and the revolutionary unions affiliated with the T. U. U. L. have put forth the slogan of the 7-hour day without reduction in wages, the American workers, 45 years after the initiation of the general 8-hour day movement, must still fight for that demand. In many industries workers still labor nine, ten and even more hours a day. The failure to establish the 8-hour day for all during this period is due to the aristocracy of labor who, bribed by the capitalist class with comparatively high wages and better conditions of work, have left the unskilled and unorganized workers without the protection of an organized labor movement, so that they may be more easily exploited for the benefit of the owners of the industries.

The A. F. of L. Becomes Fascist

Forty years ago on Union Square, New York, the leaders of the first May Day demonstration spoke not only about the 8-hour day but about the abolition of the capitalist system. "While struggling for the 8-hour day we will not lose sight of the ultimate aim,—the abolition of the wage system," read the resolution presented to the striking masses assembled at Union Square on May First, 1890, after they had marched there in great columns under unfurled red banners through the working class sections of the metropolis. Now, the A. F. of L. and the Socialist Party make common cause with the bosses and are doing everything possible to prevent the workers from fighting for any improvement in their conditions, and instead of fighting for the abolition of the capitalist system are fighting to preserve it.

Forty years ago, the A. F. of L. appealed to the International Socialist Congress in Paris to help the American Federation of Labor with the strike movement inaugurated for May First, 1890, and the International came to the aid of the American workers by making this struggle an international one. Now, President Green and his satellite Mathew Woll, pledge the support of the A. F. of L. to each and every reactionary organization or movement formed for the purpose of combating the Communist Party which is carrying on the American fighting traditions of May First. The A. F. of L. leaders have developed from class collaborationists into open fascists, serving the capitalists as hangmen of the American working class.

In their attempt to defeat May Day and to draw the workers' organizations which are under their influence away from participation in May Day demonstrations, the A. F. of L. and other reactionary labor organizations, have fostered the observance of a so-called Labor Day on the first Monday in September of each year. Labor Day was adopted first on a local scale in 1885 and later granted by the various state governments as an antidote to May First celebrations.

Another campaign against May Day was inaugurated by the

federal government with the aid of A. F. of L. leaders when May 1 was adopted as Child Health Day. The hypocrisy of both the government and the A. F. of L. is proven by the fact that a million and more children under 16 are sweated in American mills, shops and fields for the glory of American capital.

The real meaning of this sudden interest in child welfare, however, may be gleaned from the following reference to the subject in a report submitted by the Executive Council to the 1928 Convention of the A. F. of L.:

> . . . The Communists still maintain May 1 as Labor Day. Hereafter May 1 will be known as Child Health Day, as the President is directed by the resolution passed by Congress to issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to observe May 1 as Child Health Day. The object is to create sentiment for year-round protection of the health of children. It is a most worthy purpose. *At the same time May 1 no longer will be known as either strike day or Communist Labor Day.* (Italics mine—*A. T.*)

Can it be that the A. F. of L. leaders have not heard the story about King Canute and his attempt to sweep back the tempestuous ocean waves? Or is it that in their eagerness to break the fighting spirit of the workers they are willing to try anything?

The Social-Fascism of the S. P.

The betrayal of the workers begun during the war was continued by the Socialist parties after the war. They joined bourgeois governments to protect them from the wrath of the workers; they organized counter-revolutions to thwart the workers' struggle for power; they became the butchers of the militant sections of the working class which were fighting for the overthrow of the rule of capital, just as the workers of Russia have done under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, the Party of Lenin. The social-patriotism of the Right and the social-pacifism of the Center during the war, have now been merged into social-fascism. The social-fascists have become part of the capitalist state machine, protecting it from the revolutionary actions of the workers and peasants in the imperialist and colonial countries. They call for war against the

Soviet Union and organize plots designed to arrest the progress of building Socialism there.

They have long ago abandoned the demand for the 8-hour day. They hope that the League of Nations will secure for them the shorter workday through conventions between capitalist governments. The Marseilles Congress of the Second International in 1925 declared that the 8-hour day "should be recognized only in principle." They still participate in May Day events, but only on the other side of the barricades, as was exemplified by the fiendish actions of the Socialist Chief of Police of Berlin, Zoergiebel, against the May Day, 1929, demonstrations in the working class sections of that city.

In the "Socialist" city of Vienna, the show place of the Second International, workers have been shot down in the streets when they rose against the fascist terror of the police on July 16, 1927.

The "Socialist" Prime Minister MacDonald sends troops to mow down the Hindu masses who are rising against British imperialism and its agents in India. Wherever capitalism has felt weak to cope with the rising tide of the revolutionary and national liberation movements of the workers and peasants, it has called to its service the Socialist parties, willing agents of capitalism within the labor movement, to help defeat these movements.

In the United States, the Socialist Party plays the same role. Although it is not in office, it has already earned its spurs in the business of betraying the best aspirations and interests of the workers. It joins all reactionary forces who are vilifying the Soviet Union and are trying to whip up sentiment for war upon the workers' republic. It works with the A. F. of L. and the so-called "progressive" labor unions in hounding militant workers, in supporting the bosses against the workers, in applauding the forces of the state when they prosecute and persecute the revolutionary movement of this country. The old leaders of the S. P. (the Hillquits and Oneals) have forsaken whatever Socialism they ever believed in and the new leaders (the Thomases and Brouns) are bourgeois liberals who use the labor movement to advance the programs and the policies of the Theodore Roosevelts of the Bull Moose days

and the Robert LaFollettes whose aim has always been to fool the masses with radical shibboleths.

Norman Thomas, the darling of the capitalist press, announces to the world in a recent book that he has brought forth a new kind of socialism, a socialism without Marxism. It has been tried before. An abler man than Thomas, Eduard Bernstein, tried to de-Marxianize Socialism more than thirty years ago. He knew better, however, than to go as far as Thomas goes in his claims. The German pioneer in this field only wanted to "correct" Marx, to "bring him up to date." The American, Thomas, knows no half-way measures. He not only "revises" Marx, but abolishes him altogether, without, however, injuring Socialism thereby, as S. P. leaders declare.

Norman Thomas and the class-collaborationist Socialist Party which he represents today perhaps better than anyone else, stand exposed before the workers of this country as the betrayers and open enemies of the only Socialism that means workers' rule, the Socialism of Marx and Lenin, the Socialism for which the Communist Party fights, the Socialism that is being built by the victorious workers and peasants in the Soviet Union today.

Revolutionary Traditions of American Labor

The American labor movement is rich in revolutionary traditions upon which the Communist Party and the Trade Union Unity League can draw in their work of organizing the American working class for revolutionary action. The great labor struggles which dot the history of the United States, bear testimony to the militancy of the American workers. Not only have the workers been ready to initiate struggles or accept provocations of the bosses, but when out on strike, they have stayed out long and fought bitterly against the combined forces of bosses and the minions of the State who always came to their aid.

A labor movement which can look back to the general strike movements of 1877 and 1886, to Homestead (1892), to the A. R. U. Strike (1894), to Lawrence (1912), to the Steel Strike (1919), to

Seattle (1919), to the many strikes in the coal, railroad, clothing and other industries, to the great struggles in Colorado, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, the Mesaba Range and, more recently, to Passaic and Gastonia, can also look forward to still greater struggles in the future. With the prevailing objective conditions—constantly deepening economic crisis, growing permanent unemployment, intensified exploitation through speed up methods, acceleration of imperialist rivalries leading to another world war, the American Labor movement, freed of its misleaders, will give an account of itself.

May 1 and March 8—Contribution of American Workers

Out of its traditions the American labor movement has given the international working class two fighting days which the revolutionary workers consider as mile posts and which they must pass each year on their way to ultimate victory. Those who were midwives at the birth of these "days" have renounced them as soon as they have acquired revolutionary meaning. The A. F. of L. helped with the inauguration of May Day. It has long expiated that sin against American capital and it is never held against it. Only labor histories hark back to the eighties, and record the unpleasant fact that the A. F. of L. participated in launching a movement which resulted in May Day.

The Socialist Party, a close, even if poor, relation of the A. F. of L., must be considered as having contributed to the origin of International Women's Day, celebrated each year on March 8. About twenty years ago the Socialist women of New York organized, in contradistinction to the bourgeois suffrage movement, a mass participation of proletarian women in the movement for woman suffrage. This particular action took place on March 8. The success of the New York demonstration led to the establishment of March 8 as Women's Day on a national scale. The International Socialist Congress in 1910 made March 8 international.

With the granting of woman suffrage in the United States, March 8 was abandoned by the S. P., since the ballot and election to office has always been the *alpha* and *omega* of that party. The



THE RED ARMY AND MOSCOW WORKERS CELEBRATE MAY DAY ON RED SQUARE WITH MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND DELEGATES FROM WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS OF MANY LANDS REVIEWING THE PARADE

Russian working women did not forget March 8 and, following the October Revolution, rejuvenated this important fighting labor day. The Communist International made International Women's Day again a living reality. As in the case of May 1, only the Communist parties are carrying on the traditions of March 8, with men and women workers jointly utilizing this day to call upon the proletarian women to take their place in the struggles beside the men workers.

The Future Belongs to Communism

For the May Day, 1923, edition of the weekly *Worker,* C. E. Ruthenberg wrote: "May Day—the day which inspires fear in the hearts of the capitalists and hope in the workers—the workers the world over—will find the Communist movement this year stronger in the U. S. than at any time in its history. . . . The road is clear for greater achievements, and in the United States as elsewhere in the world the future belongs to Communism."

In a weekly *Worker* of a generation before, Eugene V. Debs wrote in a May Day edition of the paper, published on April 27, 1907: "This is the first and only International Labor Day. It belongs to the working class and is dedicated to the Revolution."

The world is nearer to Communism today. We are living in a more advanced period now. Capitalism has swung downward and is progressively moving in that direction. The sharpness of its own contradictions is making its ability to carry on more difficult. The workers are growing in political consciousness and are engaged in a counter-offensive which is gaining in scope and depth. The oppressed colonial and semi-colonial peoples are rising and challenging the rule of imperialism.

In the Soviet Union the workers will review on May Day the phenomenal achievements of the building of Socialism. In the capitalist countries May Day will be as always a day of struggle for the immediate political demands of the working class, with the slogans of proletarian dictatorship and a Soviet Republic kept not far in the background.

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